

POSSIBLE CHANGES TO REGULATIONS FOR BLUE CRABS

The department is considering changes to the commercial fishery. Possible changes include allowing the ability to adjust the time frame for importing sponge crabs and decreasing the size of letters required for marking a vessel with the day off.

- 1) The department is considering a change that would provide flexibility for importing sponge crabs.

Discussion: The industry has been asking the department for flexibility in the dates that sponge crabs are allowed to be imported to Maryland. The department developed management options for the importation of sponge crabs based on feedback received during the May 11, 2017 crab committee meeting and based on conversations with members of the industry over the past few years. The options were discussed at the Blue Crab Industry Advisory Committee meeting September 28, 2017. The committee supported the expansion of the sponge crab importation time frame from 71 days (April 25 - July 5) to 122 days (April 15 - August 15). However, further discussion at the Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission meeting October 26, 2017 resulted in the recommendation to keep the time frame to a 71 consecutive day time period. The time frame must be between April 10 and July 20, but the specific dates would be adjusted by public notice. This is intended to allow more flexibility for the crab processors in Maryland to acquire the necessary product for their businesses while conserving the resource. The dates would be set by public notice after consultation with the processors and could be modified on an annual basis.

- 2) The department would like to change the size requirement for the abbreviation of the day off from 4 inches to 3 inches to be consistent with the rest of the commercial marking requirements.

Discussion: The size for the numbers required to mark commercial vessels was changed from 4 inches to 3 inches in 2016. The crab requirement was overlooked at the time. Three inch numbers and letters are the standard size sold in stores as well as the standard used by the industry.